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www.health.ri.gov

Interim Health Advisory

Date: October 15, 2009

To: Athletic Administrators, Coaches & After-School Program Providers

From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH

Re: H1N1 Flu Guidance for Athletic Teams, Athletes, and After-School Programs

Children/students participating in sports and other after-school programs may more easily spread illness if they are not diligent about following hygienic practices and because they have close contact with other individuals. The following provides some "common sense" guidance to support efforts that will help decrease the spread of H1N1 and seasonal influenza.

- Remind all students of prevention messages:
 - 1) Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand gel. Students should carry hand gel in school.
 - 2) Cough and sneeze into your elbow, not your hand.
 - 3) Do not share eating or drinking utensils (e.g. cups, straws, water bottles).
 - 4) People who are sick with flu-like symptoms should stay home until they have been fever free (fever less than 100° F / 37.8° C) for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications. Flu-like symptoms include fever and a sore throat or fever and a cough. Other possible symptoms include: headache; muscle and joint aches; nausea, vomiting or diarrhea; fatigue; pneumonia, and shortness of breath.
- Explain the symptoms of influenza to students (fever plus cough or fever plus sore throat);
- Explain how flu spreads (coughs, sneezes, hand contact, etc.);
- Tell students to stay home and out of practices, games or other program activities if they feel ill or have a fever. If students arrive to an activity sick, send them home;
- Eliminate all penalties for missing practices, games or other program activities due to illness, flu-like symptoms or fever;
- Remind athletes to **never** share mouthguards;
- Remind students to never share towels or other fabric items that have come into contact with hands or face;
- If a student becomes ill during a practice, game or other activity, try to separate that student from others, if possible (6 feet away or more);
- Provide strong messages of hygiene, not sharing, etc., for any students with conditions that put them at especially high risk for complications from flu (e.g. diabetes, asthma, immunocompromised, etc.);
- Have alcohol hand gels readily available near fields, in locker rooms, in classrooms, on buses, etc.;
- No additional cleaning of program or sports-related equipment is needed as flu viruses only survive on surfaces for up to 3 hours;
- Remind parents to practice these prevention measures at home, too;
- Plan for higher-than-normal staff absences. Staff may be sick or need to stay home to care for someone else who is sick. Have an alternate plan for these activities and for student supervision in these instances;

Resources:

- Rhode Island Department of Health H1N1 Influenza Site: <http://www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/swineflu/swineflu.php>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <http://www.hhs.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov>